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Road Construction and Wet Weather Logistics in Laos

The North Vietnamese have been improving the original Laotian roadnet and building new military roads since early 1965. Their construction methods and the general condition of these roads have steadily improved over time. Beginning in the last quarter of 1967, at the end of the last monsoon season, the Communist road construction and repair effort was noticeably intensified and is still in progress. The roads which were started in late 1967 have a limited all weather capability. Many of the earlier routes have been upgraded during the dry seasons by the construction of bypasses around chokepoints and wet areas and in a few cases by the construction of alternate routes. In these past dry seasons bypasses and alternate routes have been constructed by not in the numbers noted this year. Upgrading and improvement have also been achieved by the addition of gravel where available and an extensive use of corduroy.

In the 1967-68 dry season (Sep 1967-April 1968) it is estimated that an average of "about 176" tons per day were transported by truck "into" the Laotian panhandle. According to current estimates we believe that dry season capacities of these roads is about 550 short tons per day (see Map). On the other hand, current estimates of wet season capacity range from 150 to 200 tons per day (see map). Moreover, we estimate that on the average for the entire monsoon season, May through September, at least 25 percent and as much as 50 percent of the dry season capacity can be trucked over the Laotian panhandle road system.

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It is true that in the past there has been little or no truck traffic noted during the monsoon season. The logistical needs of enemy troops in South Vietnam have been supplied from caches established during the dry season and supplemented by waterborne movements coupled with a considerable amount of portering. The situation has changed drastically since the summer of 1967 in terms of the need for relatively large tonnages of military supplies. Enemy troop strength and combat activity have increased to a point where it is no longer practical nor safe for the enemy to depend on caches and portering over long distances to supply tactical needs for a five months monsoon period. Therefore, it has become necessary for them to construct supply lines with some all weather capability. We believe that North Vietnamese long range strategy took into account the need for a limited all weather network and that all recent road construction has been done with this in mind. We believe that there will be considerable truck movement throughout most of the 1968 monsoon season. Just because trucking appeared to cease during past monsoon seasons is little or no basis for concluding that there will be none this year.

In conclusion, to assume that the North Vietnamese have learned nothing about building all weather military roads over the past three years is false. Moreover to assume that we Americans have all the know how for building all weather roads in Southeast Asia is equally false.

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